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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR RICE'S MEETING WITH UNRWA
COMMISSIONER-GENERAL ABUZAYD

Classified By: Ambassador Susan E. Rice for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Karen AbuZayd, Commissioner-General of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), met Ambassador Rice prior to AbuZayd's Jan. 27 appearance before the Security Council and described the humanitarian situation in Gaza as very bad. She stated that the US has a vital role to play in supporting relief and recovery initiatives. While UNRWA and other aid agencies continue efforts to meet basic humanitarian needs such as food, health care, shelter and water, planning for early recovery has taken center stage. Adequate supplies of food and medical items appear to be in the pipeline. However, UNRWA's work to provide emergency and recovery assistance remains stymied by Israeli-imposed restrictions on the movement of critical relief and recovery supplies. AbuZayd requested USG assistance in convincing Israel to significantly expand the use of border crossings to permit adequate levels of aid and much-needed commercial goods to reach Gaza. She also asked for support in getting Israel to lift restrictions on commodities that are vital to the recovery effort, especially building materials such as concrete to repair the thousands of homes damaged or destroyed by the Israeli offensive.

¶2. (C) On the political side, AbuZayd pinpointed the need for Palestinian unity in order for relief and recovery efforts to succeed and opined that moderate elements of Hamas might choose a pragmatic path and work with Fatah. Noting that the USG normally provides one-quarter of UNRWA's funding requirements, the Commissioner-General expressed hope for a generous US response to the upcoming Flash Appeal for Gaza, roughly an additional \$60 million. When asked about Israeli bombardment of UNRWA facilities, AbuZayd could not explain how this occurred since UNRWA staff had been in constant contact with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and provided them with the coordinates of UNRWA facilities in order to avoid such attacks. End summary.

¶3. (C) AbuZayd, accompanied by the director of the UNRWA office in New York, Andrew Whitley, described the humanitarian situation in Gaza as very bad. Noting progress in the delivery of food and medical care to Gaza's stricken population, she outlined longer-term challenges in dealing with the huge quantity of housing stock destroyed by Israel's bombardments and psycho-social trauma suffered by civilians caught between the warring parties. UNRWA and other aid agencies involved in humanitarian relief and early recovery efforts find it difficult to move forward due to Israel's routine closure of border crossings as well as strict prohibitions on the movement of needed relief and recovery

commodities.

¶ 14. (C) According to AbuZayd, to maintain its operations under normal circumstances, UNRWA requires the movement of 400 trucks into Gaza on a daily basis. Since the start of the conflict in late December, no more than 200 trucks per day have been allowed to enter Gaza from Israel. Israeli authorities prohibit or limit many supplies required by UNRWA for early recovery initiatives, especially building materials such as cement and glass. AbuZayd expressed frustration that recovery projects may not be implemented even with generous contributions from donors due to Israel's tight restrictions on the movement of recovery commodities into Gaza. She asked for USG support in convincing Israel to significantly improve humanitarian access into Gaza for both relief and recovery supplies as well as humanitarian personnel.

¶ 15. (C) Aside from core humanitarian needs, Gazans also need employment and access to cash to provide for their daily needs. Israel continues to severely limit the transfer of currency into Gaza, leaving the civilian population with no means to conduct transactions. UNRWA has been able to access cash for payments to its staff. If recovery supplies, particularly construction materials, can flow into Gaza, UNRWA and other aid agencies can begin projects that will provide much-needed employment opportunities to idle Gazans. Currently, \$93 million worth of UNRWA projects have been suspended due to Israel's limitations on the movement of building materials into the territory.

¶ 16. (C) AbuZayd believes that the rift between Fatah and Hamas

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will hamper assistance to Gaza. Only a unity government will allow speedy progress in recovery efforts. Moderates within Hamas who do not see an advantage in returning to war with Israel will be willing to join Fatah as a matter of pragmatism.

¶ 17. (C) AbuZayd noted that she had good relations with Israel's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT). However she could not understand how Israeli forces managed to fire upon a number of UNRWA facilities in Gaza leaving scores of civilians dead and wounded. She remarked that UNRWA staff had been in constant contact with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and provided them with the coordinates of their buildings and compounds in order to avoid such tragedies.

¶ 18. (C) On the funding side, UNRWA will seek \$345 million for emergency and early recovery assistance as part of a \$600 - \$800 million UN Flash Appeal for Gaza to be launched in Geneva on February 2nd. AbuZayd visited Riyadh this week and left with no clear commitment from the Saudi government which plans to announce its contribution at an upcoming pledging conference. She worried about asking the Saudis for a sizable donation if UNRWA lacks the ability to implement programs due to Israeli-imposed restrictions on relief and recovery supplies entering Gaza.

¶ 19. (C) Noting that State/PRM provides one-quarter of UNRWA's budget, AbuZayd expressed hope that the U.S. total contribution to UNRWA's emergency and early recovery program for Gaza will expand beyond the \$25 million already committed to reach a total of \$85 million.
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